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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 04 TBILISI 000019

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DEPARTMENT FOR EUR/CARC

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PHUM](#) [KDEM](#) [GG](#)
SUBJECT: TBILISI ELECTIONS UPDATE 01/04/2008

Classified By: Ambassador John F. Tefft for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

Opposition--We Won't Back Down

¶1. (U) On January 4, DCM, the diplomatic community, and ODIHR's Ambassador Boden, met with opposition members Levan Gachechiladze, United Opposition Candidate, Tina Khidasheli, Republican Party, Salome Zourabichvili, Georgia's Way, and Kakha Kukava, Conservative Party. The tone of the candidates suggested they are spoiling for a fight. Gachechiladze was first to say that the elections have already failed, as the opposition has had not enough time to campaign, there is no media to cover them, and widespread intimidation exists. Khidasheli said the United National Movement some time ago had filed a permit for the dates January 5-14 to allow them to have public manifestations at Rike. According to Khidasheli, the UNM plan is to hold an exit poll, declare victory, and then celebrate in the streets. When this occurs, she vowed the United Opposition will also take to the streets and confront them, saying, "We won't give in on anything. We will meet them action for action. We know our country and we won't just let them take it."

¶2. (C) Khidasheli said the problems on election day will be at the District Election Commissions (DECs). In contrast to past elections where she alleged ballot stuffing was used, on January, she alleges that more sophisticated means will be used such as carousel voting. All political party representatives acknowledged that they will trust the ISFED parallel voter tabulation. All of them dismissed the validity of an exit poll.

¶3. (C) Kukava complained bitterly that all concerns the opposition had raised have been ignored by the administration. The DCM asked if the opposition has filed the complaints with the Government's Interagency Task Force, the body which was designed to address such issues, but Kukava was vague in his reply.

Gachechiladze Says Elections Not Fair

¶4. (U) On January 4, Levan Gachechiladze made a public statement that the elections taking place in Georgia are not free, since the opposition does not have the same access to resources that Saakashvili has, opposition supporters are being terrorized, and black PR is being unleashed against the opposition. Gachechiladze called on the international community not to close its eyes to this, since the West "does not need a Georgia where fraudulent elections occur." He again called on supporters to stand "by each ballot box" and each precinct to ensure victory and save Georgia.

January 6 Plans

15. (U) According to news sources on January 4, the United Opposition is calling for a public rally on January 6 to directly announce to the public the results of vote results. Kakha Kukava said he does not trust the media to be accurate in the announcement of the results, and therefore, will hold a public forum to announce the results. A Tbilisi municipality contact told us privately that the opposition had applied for a permit to demonstrate from 0500 on January 6 through January 12 from Rike park to Rustaveli Avenue. According to news sources on January 4, the opposition has been denied the permit to hold a rally for the above dates on the grounds that the paperwork was not submitted on time. We also understand the National Movement has requested a permit to rally at Freedom Square on January 6. The law states that such requests should be filed five days prior to the beginning of the event.

Patriarch Plans Christmas Procession

16. (U) According to news sources on January 4, the Patriarch is organizing a Christmas procession for January 7, Orthodox Christmas, as part of its annual activities, on Rustaveli Avenue, the likely site of election demonstrations.

Imedi Films on Election Day

17. (U) Vladimir Voronov, President of News Media Russia and
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a close associate of Badri Patarkatsishvili, is currently in Tbilisi working with Lewis Robertson, News Corp Caucasus CEO and Imedi General Manager, to try to assemble a staff and get Imedi back on the air at the soonest possible moment. The journalists who left Imedi are unwilling to return, and most other journalists are also unwilling to work under the current circumstances. Voronov was trying to assemble a staff and restart broadcasting before the election. Journalists were concerned that Patarkatsishvili would use Imedi to orchestrate protests. Robertson does not feel that it will be possible to start broadcasting before January 7, but wants Imedi to play a role in reporting on the aftermath of the election.

18. (U) One large group of former Imedi investigative journalists now plan to form an NGO and to work as an independent studio to produce stories. They will make a deal with Prime Time Media and the government which will permit them to control the content of the reporting, the government will guarantee placement of the product, and they will be able to use the Primetime (TBC) equipment. Their wish is eventually to get grants to have their own independent radio. Imedi will have camera crews taking footage on Election Day for their archives.

CEC Promises Prompt Posting of Results

19. (U) According to the Chairman of the Election Commission (CEC), the release of official results will be posted by 2000 on Sunday, January 6. The CEC is required to release the final results, according to the electoral code, on Sunday, January 13.

INTERAGENCY TASK FORCE

¶10. (C) On January 3, DCM and other members of the diplomatic community met with the Interagency Task Force to discuss election issues. Eka Zguladze, Deputy Minister, Ministry of Internal Affairs, said that they continue to actively investigate cases which are linked to election infractions. She cited that two public servants in Adjara have been fired for misuse of administration resources, one policeman was issued a warning for his activism while on duty, and heavy handed United National Movement activists have been reprimanded. Currently, there are 25 criminal cases linked to illegal election activity including three kidnapping cases. Zguladze said that MOIA needs more information to pursue cases, and in most instances, the complaints they receive are too general and are without specific details.

¶11. (C) Eka Tkeshelashvili, Minister of Justice, said that in the present polarized environment, emotions are running high and the smallest incident is blown out of proportion. She said she spends more time dealing with perceptions than reality. She cited a recent example from David Usupashvili. Usupashvili alleged that a group of his activists had been illegally stopped by the police in Kutaisi during a rally and that he would provide to MOIA actual video footage to validate his charge. Tkeshelashvili said that she has never received the video footage. When she checked she learned that the alleged infraction was nothing more than a policeman requesting a bus load of the activists to move because it was blocking traffic, but that the small incident had been somehow dramatized into something much more.

¶12. (C) With regards to police plans for Election Day, Zguladze said that the MOIA has no preventive plans, only reactive ones. Now that the opposition plans to have their activists outside the precincts, she didn't want to compound the problem by having additional overt police presence to antagonize the situation. Her biggest fear is that the United National Movement and the United Opposition activists will both take to the streets on the day after the elections, thereby placing the police in the awkward position of being in the middle of two opposing forces.

¶13. (C) Zguladze said the MOIA hotline has received 640 calls, 512 of which were complaints about the voter's list, 31 which were general election questions, and the remainder were calls which were not election related. The number of complaints they had been receiving about voters being asked for their identification numbers have significantly dropped. The ones which have been received recently can be linked to either CEC efforts to verify voter information, activists attempting to clarify their support base, or the government office requesting the information for verification of

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financial disclosure.

¶14. (C) Tkeshelashvili said claims of abuse of administrative resources by the United National Movement's (UNM) use of two government helicopters are without merit. The UNM paid for both of these services and have provided the contracts as evidence of this fact.

Badri-He's Back

¶15. (U) On January 3, Badri Patarkatsishvili announced that he will not withdraw his candidacy from the presidential elections scheduled for January 5th. He cited his change of heart to a telephone conversation with the Georgian Patriarch Ilia II. In response, the Patriarch released a statement refuting earlier information disseminated by Patarkatsishvili's Office to the effect that Patarkatsishvili's decision to run was inspired by his conversation with the Patriarch. The Patriarch's speaker said that the only subject of the conversation was

congratulations on the 30th anniversary of the Patriarch's enthronement. The Patriarch's speaker expressed concern that the church was used for political speculations.

¶16. (U) On January 3, Goga Zhvania resigned as Patarkatsishvili's campaign manager in protest of Patarkatsishvili's reversing directions and rejoining the race. On January 4, Patarkatsishvili made a televised statement in which he said, "The election campaign in Georgia is becoming more and more similar to the election campaign in Pakistan, still with one difference--no candidate for the highest office has yet been killed in Georgia, although the request for assassination was placed with terrorists."

VOTING IN GALI

¶17. (U) According to news sources on January 3, Abkhaz de facto government set on fire houses of several ethnic Georgians who openly intend to participate in the elections and support Saakashvili. According to Georgian sources, several dozen Georgians have been detained by the Abkhaz police. De facto Abkhaz foreign minister Shamba said during a telephone interview with the press on the subject that, "If Georgians want to vote in Georgia, they should go live there." Contrary to some media reports, UNOMIG has verified that the administrative borders in Gali are not closed and there is freedom of movement to permit voting.

Intimidation in Marneuli

¶18. (C) In a December 31 meeting with DCM and two other representatives from the diplomatic community, Tina Khidasheli and Kakha Kukava alleged wide-spread intimidation of voters by the local Gamgebeli (mayor's office.) As evidence of their claims, they brought with them 12 witnesses from Marneuli and Rustavi. The witnesses alleged that they had either been fired or were threatened with the possibility of being fired if they did not support the National Movement.

Protests

¶19. (U) On December 29, about 5,000 people gathered at Rike, an open area in downtown Tbilisi, in support of Levan Gachechiladze, the nine-party opposition coalition presidential candidate. The United Opposition alleges the authorities are planning to rig the elections and that the United Opposition will not tolerate such an action. The rally promoted the theme that voters must protect their votes.

Maisashvili Campaign Seeks Middle Ground

¶20. (SBU) We met December 28 with Giorgi Gaganidze, campaign manager for Giorgi Maisashvili, a former ally and economic advisor to Saakashvili, who is one of the lesser-known presidential candidates. Gaganidze raised many of the same concerns about administrative resources as other opposition campaigns, and complained that Maisashvili was particularly disadvantaged because his new party was not considered to meet the requirements for state financing -- and therefore did not get free air time as most other campaigns have. Despite his objections to the pre-election process, Gaganidze

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stressed that his campaign was the only one that could conceivably "legitimize" a Saakashvili victory by accepting it, something he was sure other opposition campaigns would never do.

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